

an inflatable vehicle occupant protection device that is inflatable away from the vehicle roof into a position between the side structure of the vehicle and a vehicle occupant, said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device defining an inflatable volume and having a length extending along the side structure of the vehicle, said inflatable volume including a forward portion for location forwardly in the vehicle and a rearward portion for location rearwardly in the vehicle;

an inflation fluid source that provides inflation fluid for inflating said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device, said inflation fluid consisting essentially of helium stored under pressure; and

a fill tube having a portion located in said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device extending into said forward portion and said rearward portion of said inflatable volume, said fill tube being in fluid communication with said inflation fluid source, said inflation fluid source, when actuated, providing said inflation fluid to said fill tube, said fill tube including outlet apertures positioned along said portion of said fill tube for directing said inflation fluid into said inflatable volume to inflate said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device initially to a first desired pressure and maintain said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device inflated above a second desired pressure, less than said first desired pressure, for a predetermined period of time, said predetermined period of time being at least 5-7 seconds;

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said inflation fluid being directed through said outlet apertures into said forward portion and said rearward portion of said inflatable volume to inflate said forward and rearward portions, said inflation fluid directed into said forward portion and said inflation fluid directed into said rearward portion having generally the same temperature and generally the same pressure during initial inflation of said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device, said inflation fluid in said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device having a temperature about equal to an ambient temperature in which said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device is inflated for at least 95% of said predetermined period of time.

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35. (Amended) Apparatus for helping to protect an occupant of a vehicle that has a side structure and a roof, said apparatus comprising:

an inflatable vehicle occupant protection device that is inflatable away from the vehicle roof into a position between the side structure of the vehicle and a vehicle occupant, said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device defining an inflatable volume and having a length extending along the side structure of the vehicle;

an inflation fluid source that provides inflation fluid for inflating said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device, said inflation fluid consisting essentially of helium stored under pressure; and

~~a fill tube having a portion located in said~~
inflatable vehicle occupant protection device extending into
said inflatable volume, said fill tube being in fluid
communication with said inflation fluid source, said inflation
fluid source, when actuated, providing said inflation fluid to
said fill tube, said fill tube including outlet apertures
positioned along said portion of said fill tube for directing
said inflation fluid into said inflatable volume to inflate
said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device initially
to a first desired pressure and maintain said inflatable
vehicle occupant protection device inflated above a second
desired pressure, less than said first desired pressure, for a
predetermined period of time, said predetermined period of
time being at least 5-7 seconds;

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said inflation fluid being directed through said
outlet apertures into said inflatable volume to inflate said
inflatable volume, said inflation fluid directed into said
inflatable volume having a temperature that is generally the
same and a pressure that is generally the same throughout the
length of said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device
during initial inflation of said inflatable vehicle occupant
protection device, said inflation fluid in said inflatable
vehicle occupant protection device having a temperature about
equal to an ambient temperature in which said inflatable
vehicle occupant protection device is inflated for at least
95% of said predetermined period of time.

46. (Amended) A method for helping to protect an occupant of a vehicle that has a side structure and a roof, said method comprising the steps of:

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providing an inflatable vehicle occupant protection device that is inflatable away from the vehicle roof into a position between the side structure of the vehicle and a vehicle occupant, said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device defining an inflatable volume and having a length extending along the side structure of the vehicle, said inflatable volume including a forward portion for location forwardly in the vehicle and a rearward portion for location rearwardly in the vehicle;

providing an inflation fluid source that provides inflation fluid for inflating said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device, said inflation fluid source, when actuated, providing said inflation fluid to inflate said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device initially to a first desired pressure and maintain said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device inflated above a second desired pressure, less than said first pressure, for a predetermined period of time, said predetermined period of time being at least 5-7 seconds, said inflation fluid consisting essentially of helium stored under pressure, said inflation fluid source being free from pyrotechnic material for heating said inflation fluid; and

providing a fill tube for directing said inflation fluid into said forward portion and said rearward portion of said inflatable volume, said inflation fluid directed into

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said forward portion and said inflation fluid directed into said rearward portion having a temperature that is generally the same and a pressure that is generally the same during initial inflation of said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device to cause said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device to inflate evenly throughout the length of said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device, said inflation fluid directed into said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device having a temperature about equal to an ambient temperature in which said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device is inflated for at least 95% of said predetermined period.

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48. (Amended) The method of claim 46, further comprising the steps of providing said fill tube having a predetermined cross-sectional flow area and a predetermined number of said outlet apertures spaced a predetermined distance apart from each other along said portion of said fill tube, said predetermined cross-sectional flow area, said predetermined number of outlet apertures, and said predetermined distance being selected to provide said inflation fluid in said forward and rearward portions at generally the same pressure and temperature.

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52. (Amended) Apparatus for helping to protect an occupant of a vehicle that has a side structure and a roof, said apparatus comprising:

an inflatable vehicle occupant protection device that is inflatable away from the vehicle roof into a position between the side structure of the vehicle and a vehicle occupant, said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device defining an inflatable volume and having a length extending along the side structure of the vehicle;

an inflation fluid source for providing inflation fluid to inflate said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device, said inflation fluid consisting essentially of helium stored under pressure; and

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a fill tube having a portion located in said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device, said fill tube being in fluid communication with said inflation fluid source, said inflation fluid source, when actuated, providing said inflation fluid to said fill tube, said fill tube directing said inflation fluid into said inflatable volume to inflate said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device initially to a first desired pressure and maintain said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device inflated above a second desired pressure, less than said first desired pressure, for a predetermined period of time, said predetermined period of time being at least 5-7 seconds, said fill tube being adapted to deliver said inflation fluid into said inflatable volume such that said inflation fluid directed into said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device has a temperature about just above an ambient temperature in which said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device is inflated.

Please add new claims 55 and 56 as follows:

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55. Apparatus for helping to protect an occupant of a vehicle that has a side structure and a roof, said apparatus comprising:

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an inflatable vehicle occupant protection device that is inflatable away from the vehicle roof into a position between the side structure of the vehicle and a vehicle occupant, said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device defining an inflatable volume and having a length extending along the side structure of the vehicle, said inflatable volume including a forward portion for location forwardly in the vehicle and a rearward portion for location rearwardly in the vehicle;

an inflation fluid source that provides inflation fluid for inflating said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device, said inflation fluid consisting essentially of helium stored under pressure; and

means for directing said inflation fluid into said inflatable volume to inflate said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device initially to a first desired pressure and maintain said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device inflated above a second desired pressure, less than said first desired pressure, for a predetermined period of time, said predetermined period of time being at least 5-7 seconds, said means being for directing said inflation fluid into said forward portion and said rearward portion of said inflatable volume to inflate said forward and rearward portions, said means also being for directing said inflation fluid into said

forward portion and into said rearward portion at generally the same temperature and generally the same pressure during initial inflation of said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device, said inflation fluid in said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device having a temperature about equal to an ambient temperature in which said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device is inflated for at least 95% of said predetermined period of time;

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said means for directing comprising a fill tube having a portion located in said inflatable vehicle occupant protection device extending into said forward portion and said rearward portion of said inflatable volume, said fill tube being in fluid communication with said inflation fluid source, said inflation fluid source, when actuated, providing said inflation fluid to said fill tube, said fill tube including outlet apertures positioned along said portion of said fill tube through which said inflation fluid is directed into said forward and rearward portions of said inflatable volume.

56. Apparatus for helping to protect an occupant of a vehicle that has a side structure, said apparatus comprising:
an inflatable side curtain having a length extending along the vehicle side structure;
a stored helium inflator for providing helium inflation fluid for inflating said side curtain, said inflator being free from pyrotechnic material for heating said helium inflation fluid; and

a fill tube for directing said helium inflation fluid into said side curtain to inflate said side curtain, said fill tube being for distributing said helium inflation fluid evenly along the length of said side curtain to cause pressurization of said side curtain evenly along its length and maintain said pressurization for at least 5 seconds, said fill tube also being for heating said helium inflation fluid so that the helium in said side curtain has a temperature about equal to an ambient temperature in which said side curtain is deployed for at least 95% of said at least 5 seconds.

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